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ABSTRACT

Teachers know that these metaphors affect the teaching of composition: the banking concept of knowledge, student ownership of writing, and writing as risk-taking. However, these metaphors explain more to teachers and less to students who are writers. When teachers speak of the writing process in such terms as mapping, voicing, and brainstorming, visual images are accurately associated with linguistic meaning. A metaphor of the Romantic era, "The Book of Nature," refers to observing nature literally. Romanticism locates meaning in the individual's ability to coordinate observations of nature with linguistic interpretations of nature, moving beyond egocentric and ethnocentric viewpoints. Recently, metaphors have been investigated as a cognitive process. If metaphors are a cognitive domain both independent of, and dependent on, the visual and linguistic systems, then language arts theory and instruction should be reexamined. Also to be further examined are: (1) the new significance of the function of metaphor in classical and expressive rhetorics; (2) how emergent literacy scholars associate the acquisition of writing with the drawing of pictures but do not use drawing-word connections as significant language instruction tools for the primary grades; and (3) making metaphor instruction central in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction methodology that teaches vocabulary and reading skills. Metaphor may unite composition and literature for the purpose of teaching freshman composition, which implies that composition and literature are blood relatives, not stepchildren. (Contains 26 references.) (CR)

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Composition Theory as Metaphor:

For Our Eyes Only?

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Composition Theory as Metaphor:

For Our Eyes Only?

As teachers, we know that these metaphors affect the teaching of composition: the banking concept of knowledge, student ownership of writing, and writing as risk-taking. The banking concept of knowledge derives from Paulo Freire's book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), and suggests that we should not treat our students like they are empty bank accounts, accounts into which we deposit our knowledge. Student ownership of writing derives from Graves's Rhetoric and Composition (1984), and suggests that we should encourage our students to own, or to personally invest in, their writing. The writing as risk-taking metaphor derives from Elbow's Writing Without Teachers (1973), and suggests that we should ask our students to accept, not deny, that intellectual risks are an important, positive aspect of writing. However, I think that these metaphors for composition theory explain more to us as teachers and less to our students who are writers. Consequently in this paper I propose first that these metaphors are weak for having a misleading or vague visual appeal; second, the linguistic and symbolic use of visual memories creates preferable metaphors; and third, metaphor's role in composition theory and language instruction needs to be re-examined. I support these propositions with a rhetorical (critical), humanities (Romantic), and scientific (visual) argument.

The Critical Argument

In critical pedagogy the dialogic teacher rejects the banking concept of knowledge and inspires students to critically examine the cultural assumptions of the classroom and of the dominate culture. To model this thinking, as critical teachers, we should be critically examining what are the dominate metaphors of our profession. Here I fashion this examination from a

student's perspective. That is, I assume that our metaphors have an explanatory power for students. I assume that these metaphors operate through suggesting meaningful and sensible images to them.

Unfortunately when a student examines the banking concept of knowledge, he or she may enjoin an irreconcilable contradiction. At first the student may envision the mind as a bank account and imagine that to save money is good and to possess the teacher's knowledge is desirable. Now is the teacher who is rooted in critical pedagogy suppose to suggest to the student that the value of an education does not derive from a teacher(s) or school(s)? Or is the teacher to admit to the student that the banking metaphor is misleading? Or will the critical teacher defend the metaphor?

Let us suppose that the same teacher tells the same student that student ownership of writing is good. Now our student may view his or her writing as property and report the following logic to the composition teacher: it is the property owner, the student, who determines the fair market price of the property, the paper. Because the student owns the writing, he or she may rightfully ask the teacher to pay an "A" to transfer ownership. But of course our student also knows that the composition teacher may re-determine the worth of the writing. The student knows that report-card grades are really not negotiable and that paying for an education is not like buying a grade. Right? Or, might our critical thinking student consider that our ownership metaphor is misleading? I think that the visual implications of the ownership metaphor are misleading because ownership and the marketplace--the laws of supply and demand--do not describe what occurs in the composition classroom.

Nevertheless now suppose that the critical teacher may tell the same student that

risk-taking is desirable in writing. What is our student to imagine? The more outrageous the writing, the better the grade? Certainly the risk factor has increased. Is the student to think that writing is really like gambling, in which you risk what you can afford to lose? Is the student suppose to gamble meaning away? When our student writes is that like placing a bet with the teacher, and the student bets that his or her writing is worth an "A"? In this scene, what does the teacher risk? Here again our composition theory as expressed by metaphor seems weak for having a vague or misleading visual appeal and for requiring at least a graduate education to fully understand.

If we are critical teachers, we need to explain to our students the meaning behind these metaphors. We need to explain why we teach composition as we do. As composition teachers we have sensed that each of our metaphors suggests that capitalism is central to our theory. Yet, we probably suppose that it is not when teaching students. The problem is that *we* know that these metaphors are meant to evoke the questioning of authority, teacher, and classroom. Yet, *they* may not. Are we to hope that *all* students will question the value, as well as the moral implications of, the materialist impulse? Do the banking, ownership, and risk-taking metaphors serve that end?

The Romantic Argument

In spite of our professional metaphors suggesting that capitalism motivates our composition theory, the metaphors seem to obscure important philosophical questions, e.g., does capitalism derive from Nature? Here I think that it is noteworthy that our metaphors are problematic because they do exclude natural images from their meaning as if composition theory itself is void of any concern for Nature. But rather than address the problem of composition vs.

literary theory here I will briefly review the Romantic era metaphor, the *Book of Nature*, because of its associating natural visual images with intellectual linguistic processes.

The Book of Nature was a common and persuasive metaphor originating in the Middle Ages and living through the Romantic Age of Europe (Olson, 1994, pp. 169-78). The Book of Nature metaphor meant that literally observing Nature was like figuratively watching God write. It meant that language, even the Bible, held truth on a figurative, not literal level. Thus to search for truth required interpretation, or the coordinating of visual images with linguistic understanding. The Book of Nature metaphor suggests, in other words, that our language and vision have meaning when contextualized by Nature (and God).

As scholars, we know that Romanticism arose in European history as a reaction against the "mechanized and industrialized world" (Bowden, 1995, p. 179). It later roots itself in America's literature as read in Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, and others. In the Transcendental movement, consequently, there are writers who create natural images that refer to European/American Romanticism and to Eastern philosophical thought. Later in American history, our original Romantic traditions are explicitly associated with our awareness of Eastern or Buddhist concepts of Nature, or as Bailey (1973) recounts, Eastern beliefs have woven their way through the Beat Movement and into the Hippie Movement to form what Applebee (1974) calls the New Romanticism of the 1960s and 70s. In all this history, therefore, we find the ghost of the previously stated Book of Nature metaphor. That is, we find that Nature is the source of metaphor.

Regarding composition theory, Lewitt explains how the Eastern view of Nature creates metaphor in the article entitled Zen and the Art of Composition: A Comparison of Teaching

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Methods (1988). Therein, he describes exact parallels between composition instruction and Buddhist teachings. Furthermore in James Moffett's books, we find that metaphors based on visual and natural processes are fundamental to how we may teach composition. In fact, his conclusion for The Universe of Discourse begins with this statement: "To argue for a *naturalistic* [my italic] method of teaching is to argue against many current practices..." (1983, p. 211). He implies that if we locate ourselves within a naturalistic construct, as Buddhism and Romanticism suggest we should, then we are on the right path. In summation here I think that Romanticism locates meaning in the individual's ability to coordinate observations of Nature with linguistic interpretations of Nature, and the aspiration of Romanticism, as well as Buddhism, is to move beyond egocentric and ethnocentric viewpoints. Romanticism like Buddhism has located meaning-making in the individual, and both represent an individual's attempt "to gain union with nature" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 229). These thoughts directly contradict capitalism and its metaphors. To believe that the linguistic (metaphor) system is modeled after the visual one advances my Romantic argument and supports visual metaphors as superior to capitalistic ones.

Composition theorists who believe in language-vision connections are joined by other scholars. For instance, Shepard (1982) has proposed that "the conceptual-linguistic system itself...has...evolved out of a spatial-perspectual system" (p. 62), and the scholars, Biederman (1987), Jackendoff (1987), Marr (1982), Rosenfield (1988), and others, offer us more persuasive arguments that the human mind processes visual and linguistic information in strikingly similar and related ways. This fundamental premise also gathers strength from Young's research (1988) in which he finds that the visual and linguistic systems are closely related (p. 79), that each system has basic-level categories (p. 80), and that each is arranged hierarchically (pp. 79-83). Here and

elsewhere, I am proposing that Nature is the best source for persuasive visual metaphors because with vision we locate objects in Nature and with language we give those visions meaning.

The Visual Argument

This argument builds itself on the writings of Rosch, Marr, Biederman, Jackendoff, and Johnson. In 1979 Rosch and others publish research that introduces us to the notion of basic or primitive categories. Their research in semantics implies that a child locksteps the development of basic, or primitive, visual categories with the acquisition of words. So, for instance, when a child acquires the word for dog, he or she has already acquired the visual concept of *dogness*. Since Rosch's 1979 research, the idea of basic or primitive category has become a "long-standing theory" about how we acquire and process, visual and linguistic information (Goodluck, 1991, pp. 130-31).

In 1982 Marr and other researchers (e.g., Nishihara, 1978; Vaina, 1982) apply the notion of basic category to how we process vision. Marr's ground breaking work originates crucial terms like *mapping, filters, constraints, rules*, etc. that are now commonplace in all cognitive and neurological studies. Unlike Rosch, however, Marr (1982) suggests that our visual and linguistic systems have multiple levels of basic category and that these levels are arranged hierarchically. As Marr discusses the implications of his theories about the processing of language (1988, pp. 471-72), he suggests that bottom-to-top as well as top-to-bottom processing occurs simultaneously.

In 1987 Biederman's research provides the practical evidence for Marr's theory on vision through quantitatively verifying that hierarchical levels of vision exist and interact as expected. He concludes that at the highest level of vision, the three-dimensional one, an image is completed

by its "naming" or its fitting into the first level of the linguistic system (p. 143). Like Marr (1988, p. 472) and Jackendoff (1987, pp. 90-7), Biederman asserts that there is a crucial biological neurological link between the visual and linguistic systems (1987, pp. 115-16).

At the same time, in 1987, Jackendoff also writes a compelling research-based paper to explain how the visual and linguistic systems function in similar ways. But unlike previous researchers, he describes the two systems from a primarily linguistic perspective. His description includes explanations for how primitive linguistic categories for *thing, event, state, action, place, path, property*, and *amount* shape semantic and syntax studies (e.g., 1987, p. 98). His visual/linguistic categories also coincide with those suggested by Lakoff and Johnson in their book, Metaphors We Live By (1980, pp. 30-2). Without exception, Jackendoff links each primitive linguistic category to the processing of vision and concludes that the connections between vision's highest processing level and language's lowest processing level are indispensable to the human mind (1980, p. 110).

Years later between 1989 and 1993, Janice Johnson investigates metaphor as a cognitive process. In her early work (1989a, 1989b), she focuses on children and concludes that their minds process metaphor through the interactions of four cognitive levels. I propose that these levels are basic-level categories for metaphor because the evidence for her levels is gathered through applying visual and linguistic tests. Later in 1991 and 1993, she studies whether or not metaphor comprehension/fluency exists in adults as well as children, and whether or not it exists in languages other than English. She concludes that metaphor comprehension and fluency is a cross-linguistic phenomenon. The implicit implication of her research is that first, metaphors are essentially based on vision; second, metaphors are an essential part of the language acquisition

process; third, children and adults process metaphors in accordance with hierarchical cognitive levels; and fourth, metaphor constitutes a cross-linguistic basic category(ies). Because of her research, and the research of the previously mentioned scholars, I think that vision is the basis of language and that metaphor is the essential bridge between our visual and linguistic systems. Here, however, I will set aside the issue of whether or not orthography is another indication that metaphor is the essential link between the visual and linguistic systems.

Implications

The aforementioned arguments suggest that Lakoff and Johnson are correct when proposing that metaphor is an ontological and epistemological issue (1980). It is noteworthy, too, that all three of their metaphorical types--*orientational, physical, and structural*--are dependent on visual acuity (1980, p. 107). So when they state that "language is based on the coherences between the spatialized form of the language and the conceptual system, especially the metaphorical aspects of the conceptual system" (p. 138), I interpret them to mean that the "coherences" between the spatial (or visual) and the conceptual (or linguistic) systems are based on metaphor. To validate my interpretations of Lakoff and Johnson, I also note that their ideas are complementary to Marr's theory for vision and J. Johnson's cognitive model for metaphor processing. Lakoff and M. Johnson postulate that metaphor is processed through hierarchical levels, top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top (1980, pp. 69-76, 122-25). As I have done, Lakoff and M. Johnson complete their synthesis by relying on Rosch's notion of basic or primitive category (1980, pp. 69, 71, 122-25) and by defining such a category as open-ended, but not randomly formed (1980, p. 124). Like myself, they conclude that the ontological nature of metaphor "allow us to make sense of phenomena in the world in human terms" (1980, p. 34).

My aforementioned arguments not only suggest that Lakoff and M. Johnson need to be re-examined, but also explain why some metaphors for composition are successful, and others are not. When we speak of the writing process in terms of *mapping*, *voicing*, *brainstorming*, etc., we accurately associate visual images with linguistic meaning. I think, then, we have an easier time explaining our metaphors for composition to students. But when we talk of composition in terms of banking, ownership, and risk-taking, we are on a slippery slope. These metaphors suggest images of capitalism which mislead us and our students.

To conclude, if we believe that metaphor is a cognitive domain that is both independent of, and dependent on, the visual and linguistic systems, then we need to re-examine language arts theory and instruction. For instance, how metaphor functions in classical and expressive rhetorics has a new significance, one not currently anticipated (e.g. Berlin, 1982). Also we need to review how emergent literacy scholars associate the acquisition of writing with the drawing of pictures, but do not make explicit that drawing-word connections are significant tools for language instruction throughout the primary grades (Marvrogenes, 1987; Kamberelis, et al, 1989). Furthermore, metaphor instruction should be central in ESL methodology that teaches vocabulary and reading skills. And at last, metaphor may unite composition and literature for the purpose of teaching freshman composition, which implies that composition and literature are blood relatives, not stepchildren.

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